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Engl. Poetry vol 56.

AN

EPISTLE

FROM

SHAKESPEAR

TO HIS

COUNTRYMEN.

——— Non ego, quem vocas
Dilecte, Mæcenas, obibo;
Nec Stygiâ cohibebor undâ.

HORACE.

To which are added,

Some STANZAS upon the IMMORTALITY of the SOUL.

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THE

PREFACE.

THE Author of this little Piece is willing to hope it may be looked upon as a *Peculiar* (to borrow a canonical expreſſion) and therefore exempted from the ordinary juriſdiction of the Critic. It is, however, too trifling to be judged with ſeverity; but an excuſe may be thought neceſſary for trifling with ſo great a name as that

of

of *Shakeſpear*: it was the pleaſure the writer felt, whilſt the image of our great Poet was preſent to his fancy, that tempted him to the crime, and the Reader will forgive it, if he feels any degree of it from the peruſal of the following lines.

A N

EPISTLE, &c.

THE Bird of Day had given his early ſound,
And bells deep-ton'd in lofty towers around,
Numb'ring the duſky hours; ſince midnight deep
Told four had flown—then wing'd by gentle ſleep
The happy viſion, and illuſion ſweet,
Through the pleas'd mind on balmy pinions fleet.
I ſaw deſcending from a ſmiling ſky
A form of more than mortal dignity;

All that is pleaſing, great, or good, was there,
All that we love, and all that we revere.
It was the mighty Shakeſpear ſtood confeſt;
Heav'n had not chang'd the mind, but better dreſt.
There fix'd by Nature ev'ry ſplendor met;
The Brilliant was the ſame, though richer ſet:
He bade me take the pen, he gave the thought,
And thus the ſubject he inſpir'd I wrote:

" As when on new-fledg'd pinions taught to riſe,
The ſky-lark mounts, and ſings in ſummer ſkies:
So burſting from her ſhell of mortal clay,
High ſoars the Mind amid unclouded day:
Shakes off the bonds that ty'd her once to earth,
And gains each right of her celeſtial birth:
Looks down on all that pleas'd a mortal's eyes,
And ſees how falſe were all but Virtue's joys.

Yet ſtill for friends, a friendſhip we retain,
Promote their int'reſts, and defend from pain;

We watch their virtues, and their worth revere.
Britons! ye ſtill are to your Poet dear.
Still *Britain*'s ſons and daughters are my care,
Thoſe brave and generous, theſe chaſte and fair;
Fair as my ſilver *Avon*'s ſnowy pride,
Fair ſwans that o'er my ſilver *Avon* glide.
Think not, that from your mortal ſcene remov'd,
I can forget the ſcene which once I lov'd:
I mark your taſte, pleas'd when the ſelf-ſame fires
Glow in your breaſts, which kindled up your ſires.
In glorious records of eternal Fame,
How brightly ſhines the ancient Engliſh name!
The day (if ſuch a day can come) prevent,
Ye better Powers! when from the Continent
The train of ſoft'ning vices ſhall come o'er,
To taint the manners of the *Britiſh* ſhore!
But vain the fear; for deeds of worth deſign'd,
The noble virtues of the manly mind,
Britons have taught, and yet ſhall teach mankind.

Brave, yet humane; when led to glorious wars,
There is no fiction in the might of *Mars*:
To fight for juſtice and their country's good
Stiffens their ſinews, ſummons up their blood.
Yet, ſhew them miſery; then that gen'rous ſoul,
The ſame brave ſpirit that diſdain'd controul,
At woe ſhall melt—ſo lib'ral Nature join'd
Love of clear fame, and love of human-kind,
And bleſs'd the valiant with a feeling mind.

For them I whiſper Poets in the ear,
And give to ſing in accents loud and clear:
Then to the good and juſt the ſong they raiſe,
The good and juſt hear half their future praiſe.
What ſhare of genius to their lot may fall;
Know that ſuperior beings give it all.
We meet the Bard, what time the ev'ning gale
Breathes through the oaken ſhade, or velvet vale:
What time the conſtellations brighteſt glow,
Or *Dian* o'er her foreſts hangs her bow.

Then to immortal knowledge half refin'd,
Things more than human fill th' inſpired mind;
Then genius ſhines through all the living page,
And charms at once and mends the liſt'ning age.

Yet not for impious and unfeeling men
The lay we dictate, or we guide the pen;
But only they ſhall raiſe a ſtrain divine,
Who love to worſhip at Truth's ſacred ſhrine:
Truth which not yields to Earth's united powers,
Nor Time, which puſhes down the *cloud-capt towers.*

Nor ſhall the Actor know, unleſs we teach,
All ears to charm, and ev'ry heart to reach.
The ear, the heart, to pleaſe, 'tis we reveal;
And what he feels himſelf, make others feel:
Provoke the laugh, or raiſe the gen'rous ſigh,
Call ſmiles, or tears, into the ſtedfaſt eye:
Love's ſofter fires, or Glory's bright ones fan,
Make pity or reſentment ſeize the man.

How much for theſe the inmoſt ſoul I touch,
Aſk of my *Garrick*, he ſhall tell how much.
To him, great leader of the ſcenic train,
His Shakeſpear's genius never ſpoke in vain.
His the applauſe, the ſecret powers were mine;
He was but man, I made him half divine.
I gave the wondrous energy he felt
Of Romeo's love, and blood-ſtain'd Richard's guilt:
In Denmark's Prince made the pall'd ſoul look forth,
Whilſt ſtalk'd the ſpectre o'er the trembling earth:
I gave him his Othello; and with Lear
When Pity wept, believe me, I was there:
Mine was the force with which his Thane expreſt
The midnight horrors of the murd'rer's breaſt;
When for the *deep damnation* of his ſin,
The hell he hop'd a cheat, he finds within:
With fancy'd magic whilſt the ſcenes abound,
The real magic was his 'witching ſound.
Nor leſs in the gay ſcene was he my ſon,
For Benedict and he were both my own.

Soon

Soon ſhall be known the happy men we love,
For, like *deſcended gods*, their rank they prove,
Mark'd with a ray of brightneſs from above:
'Tis he, who ſpeaking ſeizes on the ſoul,
And all her powers can as he will controul:
'Tis he who, if to Virtue he would woo,
Feels her great truths, and makes you feel them too.
So whilſt we ſee the trembling taper bright,
It ſhall impart, and others catch its light.
'Tis he, who ſecret charms knows to inſtill,
Inchants, transforms you, makes you what he will.

'Tis he, whoſe genius form'd by Nature free,
With eaſe aſcends, and ſinks with dignity;
Whoſe page with ſenſe and juſt expreſſion fraught,
Whate'er it ſays, ſays only what it ought.
Whoſe wit, from wiſdom ſprung, on no pretence
Will raiſe your laughter at its ſire's expence.

Nor

Nor leſs is Humour of a gen'rous breed;
True Humour never made the harmleſs bleed:
It flies at Vice, the vermin of the mind;
Hunts down the Beaſt, but to the Man is kind.
To laugh away the vices of the age,
The juſt employment of the comic ſtage:
Nor is the merely inoffenſive fool
A proper ſubject for its ridicule.
But Folly, that ſhall aim to paſs for wiſe;
And Envy, muffled up in Friendſhip's guiſe:
And Lewdneſs, wearing chaſte Lucretia's mien,
(Like Hecla *, *ſnow* without, and *fire* within:)
Cunning, that thinks it paſſes for ſincere;
Bullies, who to their own great courage ſwear:
Pertneſs, that ſhall diſpute the place of wit;
Bawds, that demurely quote you holy writ:
And all who, ſeeming patriots, turn to traitors;
All who, though men in ſhape, are *Petit-Maitres*:

* A Volcano in ICELAND.

Each

Each Saint, that keeps the Sinner in his heart;
All who have choſen painted Falſhood's part,
Are Satire's lawful game; and whilſt along
Marches in ſtolen garbs th' aſſuming throng,
Happy the man who beſt can pluck aſide
Their cloaks, and ſhew what little forms they hide;
Who beſt keen Humour's two-edg'd ſword can wield,
And drive the cheats, detected, from the field:
But when they wince, by pointed ſatire ſtung,
Let all laugh out, *whoſe withers are unwrung.*

The page, whoſe ſpirit Nature deigns to give,
'Tis that, and only that, which long ſhall live:
For who without her aid preſumes to write,
Shall but a ſickly offspring bring to light;
And ſhorter time than form'd them in the brain,
Shall give the puny things to night again.
Soon ſhall the uninformed heap decay,
Which wants a ſoul, a ſpark of living day.

This but from Nature comes; the gift is her's;
'Tis our's to act as Nature's Miniſters.

For him whoſe artleſs pen I now command,
You ſee the pen yet trembles in his hand;
The flock to watch, where willows ſtoop their heads,
Liſt'ning to ſtreams that muttering waſh the meads,
His charge; and whilſt the flocks around him feed,
The babbling echoes mock the Shepherd's reed:
Nor juſtly ſhall this faint attempt offend;
I ſee his heart my country's ſtedfaſt friend.
The intention good, as judge if kindneſs ſit,
The ſhort expreſſion kindneſs will acquit."

But now he ſtretch'd his golden wings for flight,
His track diſtinguiſh'd by ſuperior light;
And through the eaſtern trees the ſun ruſh'd on my ſight.

THOUGHTS
UPON THE
IMMORTALITY of the SOUL.

NOW falls the Sun, and paints the Weſt with red,
The ſliding wave he darts a radiance o'er;
Favonius ſoftly ſtroking Ocean's head,
Whiſpers to bid him kiſs the ſhell-ſpread ſhore.

The fiſherman remits his watry toil,
Beſide yon rock his little ſkiff appears;
Back to the nightly covert of her iſle
The ſea-fowl through the clouds her paſſage ſteers.

Sublimer thought ſuch ſcenes ſhall ſtill create,
And give the joy which flows from ſuch alone:
To feel their greatneſs proves the mind is great;
To love their grandeur is to ſhew her own.

Do brutes with pleaſing awe behold the waves
When toſt with roaring rage? Or when ſerene
Its rocks and ſands the water gently laves,
Or holds a mirror to its ſilver Queen?

Do brutes look up to Nature's mighty hand,
Through all the proofs ſhe gives us of her power?
Unconſcious of her works and her they ſtand,
Nor contemplate the herbage they devour.

The mind ſelf-wafted viſits diſtant ſhores,
In vain the high wall and the pond'rous bar;
Or, when old Night pours out her glitt'ring ſtores,
She wings a thought beyond the fartheſt ſtar:

Swifter than light through the great zodiac runs,
Or ſees afar the threat'ning comet hurl'd,
Or finds the diſtant ſtars are other ſuns,
And gives them many a planetary world:

Or checks her bolder flight, pleas'd to behold
The beauties blooming in the verdant ſod;
And in the ſongſter's plumage tipt with gold,
A berry, or a bloſſom, ſee the God.

But who ſhall Nature's wondrous works declare?
The ample tome before our eyes is ſpread;
Men drink inſtruction from the volume fair,
They ſink to earth, and leave it half unread.

A happier race ~~calm~~ Wiſdom's haunts explore,
And charm'd, beſide her ſparkling ſtreams they tread.
They drop—her ſparkling ſtreams to taſte no more?
Will ſhe not place them at the fountain-head?

That vet'ran oak, which not an age matur'd,
Through ages hath withſtood th' aſſailing blaſt;
By Nature's unreverſed rule ſecur'd,
What ſlowly ripens, ſlowly too ſhall waſte.

What

What period then ſhall bid the mind expire?
When ſhall the mind its full perfection know?
Some height unreach'd ſhall ſtill excite deſire,
Whilſt ev'ry ſummit gain'd is left below.

Hence is her future greatneſs clearly taught,
'Tis Nature's dictate greatly to aſpire;
Hence flows the bold wiſh, hence the mighty thought,
And hence the viſion of the white-rob'd choir.

Could hopes, that elevate and charm like theſe,
The meer miſtake of giddy fancy prove,
The error that at once could aid and pleaſe,
That error Wiſdom's ſelf might bid us love *.

The Pilgrim panting o'er the barren ſands,
Through all his veins feels cool refreſhment glide,
When by Imagination's aid he ſtands
'Mid ſtreams that waſh the mountain's ſhaded ſide.

* Quod ſi in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales eſſe credam, lubenter erro: nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo extorqueri volo.
CICERO de Senectute.

But think you Wiſdom's light ſhall lead aſtray,
Or give us hopes intended to deceive?
Who hear no reaſon, ſee no future day;
Whom reaſon governs moſt, will moſt believe.

To Man chaſte Wiſdom ſlowly yields her charms;
But who ſhall win her, mighty is his gain;
She brings a dowry to her lover's arms,
In joys that ſoon o'erpay his former pain.

With growing years, her treaſures ſtill ſhall grow,
As nearer to the depths of knowledge led;
So riſing from its ſecret caves below,
Th' increaſing ſtream ſeeks here its native bed.

'Mid Paſſion's miſts, the bright, the heav'nly ray
But faintly enters to the early mind;
As theſe diſperſe, ſhines forth directer day,
And leſſening ſhadows ſcarcely ſtay behind.

At length the ſcene is clos'd by awful night,
And darkneſs ſteals upon the weary'd eyes;
Though ſunk, not quench'd, the animating light
In other diſtant worlds ſhall fairer riſe.

IMO argumenta ſunt non levia: datum homini dominium in ſuas actiones, appetitus immortalitatis inſitus, conſcientiæ vis conſolantis ſe ob actiones bonas, quamvis moleſtiſſimas, et ſpe quâdam ſuſtentantis; contrà cruciantis ſeſe ob pravè acta, præſertim circa mortem, tanquam ſenſu imminentis judicii: quam vim ſæpe nec peſſimi tyranni intra ſe extinguere, cum maximè id vellent, potuerunt, ut multis exemplis apparet.

De Verit. Relig. Chriſt. Lib. I. Sect. xxiv.

AN IMITATION OF A PASSAGE in GROTIUS.

SAY, if the mind is not of heav'nly birth,
Whence are the thoughts which riſe above the earth?
And Reaſon's power to guide our actions even?
And dawning hopes that ſhew a future Heaven?
What gives to injur'd Virtue joys refin'd,
That breathe their ſecret comforts through the mind?
What brings the conſcious ſhame, all eyes impart?
And writes its ſentence in the guilty heart?
See Guilt, all joyleſs on the ſeat of power!
Why does it ſtart, and hate the final hour?
Does it not ſee a future ſtate, and fear
There to endure, what it inflicted here?

FINIS.

IMITATION

OF A

PASSAGE in GROTIUS.

SAY, if the mind is not of heav'nly birth,
Whence are the thoughts which rife above the earth?
And Reafon's power to guide our actions even?
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